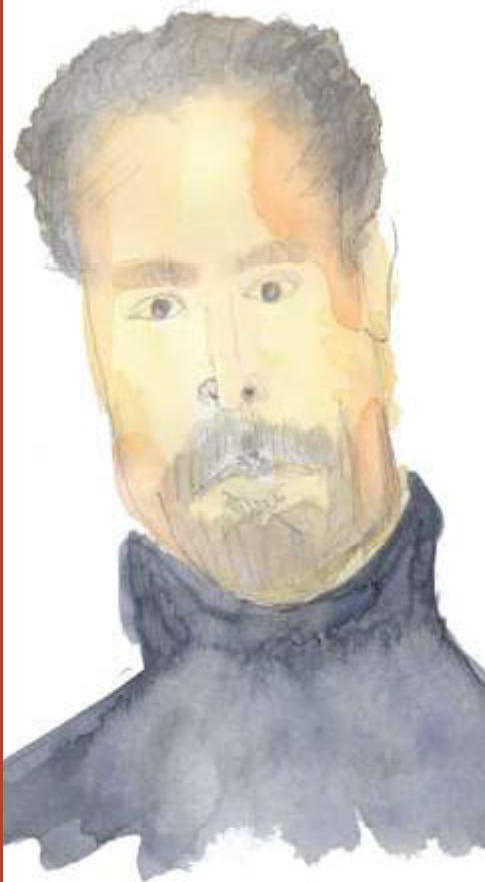


MiPo~Print

March 2004 ~ The Steven Hoadley Issue ~ Volume 3 Issue 3~ Poetry Brought To Your Printer

Boomerang

~by Steven Hoadley



I'm sitting here trying to figure out why the gods have fucked me over again, leaving me for broke by the side of the road like some old air-cooled VW bug trying to make a cross country trip. Why they've sent me all the wrong parts. Christ, I can't even get drunk properly, can't even rationalize it. The needle and the noose are my other choices, but I don't do the streets well. The sky makes a bad blanket, too unforgiving, too filthy.

The miracles never land on me.

So I sit trying to write things that will make sense of it all. In between the muse and the madness, I go to AA. It's better than beating off.

I sit on those hard fucking chairs that turn a man's ass to pummeled pork, listen to the others talk about their Higher Powers and about the mini and not so mini blessings he grants them. My God is the next line, the unwritten poem, the finish. How do I explain that?

I don't.

I just sit there and listen. Then when I am chosen to talk, it comes out like a big face-shit. I hear my voice and it sickens me. I'd slap me but they'd haul me off. Don't need that shit anymore, done enough institutions thank you. But I trudge forward and talk anyway. I talk about the time I came out of a blackout and found myself cheek-deep in the bowels of an old woman's holy spot. She was old enough to be my grandmother. Shit, she may have BEEN my grandmother. All I remember is hi-tailing it out of there and spending weeks trying to wash that tragedy off my face. Brillo pads couldn't scrub those toxins from my pores. Had to shave my beard off, broke three razors doing it. To this day I still have a strange metallic taste in my mouth. Sometimes you just can't drink certain memories away. Lord knows I've tried.

A few people laugh, I see others shaking their heads, still others leave. I snap out of it. It's time to punt. Say something spiritual, I think, but it's too late, I shank it way left: "by the grace of God, I haven't had to take a drink today, and for that, I'm grateful." No one makes eye contact with me. A nervous twitch takes over the room. The woman sitting next to me gets up, moves over a chair. An uncomfortable silence erupts. I want to leave, but I don't want to corrupt the process. Finally, a man starts speaking. Says he got sober the day Kennedy lost his head. I don't believe him, he's a cheater, I feel it. I want to raise my hand and call him on it. I want to quiz him. Who won the '74 World Series? Where were you during the Zodiac killings? How do you make a Manhattan? I think better of it and say nothing. I watch the clock struggle. Never concentrate on the second hand. Time becomes a glacier.

Contributor

Steven Hoadley

Poetry

Brothers

Ode to Interferon

Karma

Short Stories

Boomerang

Thoroughly Bad James

Portrait of Hoadley by Henry Denander
www.henrydenander.com

Finally, the meeting ends. It's time to swap cold viruses. Everyone clasps hands and launches into prayer. I say a mantra to myself: "get to the bathroom, wash your hands, don't touch your face." I repeat it three times in my head.

I make it to the bathroom, wash my hands, piss, wash my hands again. Other men begin filtering in. I keep my head down and my eyes to the floor so they don't address me. Someone might want to shake my hand. I didn't feel like washing anymore. I head to the exit. I get outside, reach for a smoke and my pack is empty. Shit. I look around, I notice a man from the meeting standing on the corner waiting for a ride. He looks miserable and thin and empty of grace.

"Hey partner, got a smoke?" I ask.

He says nothing as he reaches in his pocket and pulls out a pack of Parliaments. It's crumpled and bruised but somehow the cigarettes survive. He hands me one.

"Thanks."

He nods.

I light up and stand there with him. I have no reason to stand there, I don't want to stand there, but stand there I do. Sometimes I like to feel awkward on purpose. We exchange no words, no looks, just two smokers sharing a cancer moment.

"So," I say. "What did'ya think of the meeting?"

He shrugs.

"Yeah, same here."

The cigarettes are good, the company isn't. We continue standing there doing nothing. I grow weary of the clumsiness we are sharing. I decide to split. As I walk away, he says something.

"Wish I had a beer."

"What?"

He takes a drag off his smoke. "Wish I had a beer."

"Me too. But I like my bed. Whenever I have some beers, I always lose my bed."

"It's the shits isn't it?"

"No, I don't get the shits right away, that usually comes after a week or so."

"No man, I mean it sucks. I ain't talking about having the shits, it IS the shits."

"Oh."

"I'm going to do it anyways," he says.

"Well, I'd join ya, but I got a story to finish first. Maybe if you're here tomorrow—"

"Story? What you talking about?"

"A story, ya know, like a short story."

"You a writer?"

"Depends on who you ask."

"What do you write about?"

"About whatever comes into my head."

"Is it any good?"

"No."

"Then why do you do it?"

He gets me with that one. "I don't know."

He says nothing and nods his head. I'm not sure if it's an understanding nod, or a go away nod. I take it for the latter and slide away. It's a long walk home, but I'm a good walker. I make it in half an hour. I grab a glass out of the sink, rinse it, fill it with tap water, and head to my keyboard. I hate water. I stare at the screen and it does nothing. Finally I start to write:

I'm sitting here trying to figure out why the gods have fucked me in the ass again, leaving me for broke by the side of the road like some old air-cooled VW bug trying to make a cross country trip . . .

Man, that's bad.

Brothers

One day my brother and I
were playing in the yard
when out of nowhere
he started banging my head
against the wall.

I told my big sister about it
and she said if it happened again,
to pretend it didn't hurt.

The next day my brother and I
were back outside playing.

When we got near the wall
he started going at it
(my head, that is).

Remembering what my sister said,
I acted like it didn't hurt.

This made my brother crazy,
so he banged harder.

He kept asking me if it hurt.
Finally, I told him it did.

It still does.

Ode to Interferon

For many years
I played the junkie role
or should I say
it played me.

Regardless,
I drank
and drugged
myself
to death.

Problem is,
I lived through it.

Now my liver's as hard
as my dick is soft.

Neither works very well,
but both still carry
great sentimental value.

Now it's weekly injections,
daily pills,
and constant
depression.

Just like the good old days.

(both poems previously Published in 3rd Muse Poetry Journal)

Thoroughly Bad James

James was a horrible man. Every definition of the word applied. Sixteen of his fifty-one years had been spent shuffling between Folsom and Pelican Bay prisons. Manslaughter and rape. No doubt he'd committed other atrocities, of that I had no illusions, but those were the ones he paid for.

We sat drinking our lunch in the cocktail lounge of a Denny's restaurant on San Fernando Boulevard, not far from the Pasadena freeway and Dodger Stadium. I met James while we both worked as delivery drivers for a bingo card manufacturing company. We delivered mostly to old folks' homes and Catholic churches. It paid \$6.35 an hour. Enough to drink on and dream on. Sometimes we'd split the cost of a room. Sometimes we didn't — or couldn't.

I'd seen worse times. No work and no drinking money. I knew it wouldn't be long before I lost this job as well. Our boss was mean, spitting mean. He'd curse and swear at us for being slow, dirty, and smelling of liquor.

"Cum-lapping bastards!" he'd yell. "I knew I shouldn't have hired you. Good for nothing but cock-sucking, ass-fucking, sleeping in your own crapped pants, drunks!"

Obscene language even to us.

James wasn't much better. He'd been molded and shaped by prison life. Violence ran just under his surface, always there, always ready. His face bore hate. Hate and fear and disdain for all things happy. Small in stature — I'd never seen so much muscle and tough, chiseled flesh carried on such a short frame.

I don't know why I drank with him; I didn't like him. Perhaps because he carried enough rage for the both of us; I didn't need to display mine. His fury struck outward, my loathing turned inward. We were the worst possible combination of drinking partners. Hate going in, hate going out. Not good — and I knew it.

Yet there I sat with him in that Denny's lounge, drinking weak bourbon and little cold beers. Drinking with a life gone rotten. He sickened me. He spoke of sex, sex, rape and sex.

"Look at that bitch over there. I'd fuck that ass in a minute, huh, Sam?"

"She ain't so hot," I said.

"Big butts. Love them big fuckin' butts man. I'd pound it 'till it popped!"

"Keep it down, James. For crimony shits, you're going to get us 86`ed. We got cheap booze and air conditioning here, man. Be cool."

He sat hunkered over the table and covered his drink with his palms, holding it close to his chest. A leftover ritual from the prison chow hall.

"We can pull a train on her, man. We can be a tag team fuck duo, man. We'll plow . . ."

"Chill out, James. We ain't doing shit. We're going to pound these drinks and then finish our deliveries."

James sputtered and spat when he got worked up. It was as if his glands produced more saliva than needed. It bubbled and pooled itself in the corners of his mouth, and dripped off his lower lip. Whenever he used the letter "P", I paid the price. I was always wiping splatterings of James's spit off my face.

"Down it and let's go," I told him. "And quit fucking spitting on me!"

We hopped in our blue minivan with the faded bingo card painted on the side, and headed down San Fernando towards Sunset. Our next stop, a residence. Probably some church volunteer or priest.

The place was located in a neighborhood not far off the strip, upper-crust for sure. We found our street. On the corner was a Fast-Stop convenience store. I asked James to stop.

"I need some smokes," I told him.

"I need beer," he said.

I hadn't noticed it earlier, but James was drunker than usual. He walked with a small stagger, and a glassy sheen coated his eyes.

"Pack of Camel filters," I said to the clerk. James clinked and clanked back by the cooler, finally returning with his beer — a forty-ouncer. He dropped it on the counter with a bang. The clerk glared at him with an angry sneer. James noticed.

"Got a problem?" James asked him.

The clerk didn't reply, still wearing his look of disgust.

James picked up his beer, leaned over the counter, and slammed the bottle back down. I was surprised it didn't break.

"Got a problem, mother fucker?"

"James, chill, goddamnit. Don't be a dick!"

"No, I don't like the way this guy's looking at me, Sam," he said, never taking his eyes off the man. "Are we dirty or something? Do I smell? Who the fuck are you, asshole? You towel-headed cock-suckers think you own this country. I'll rip that cloth off your head and strangle you with it while I beat your skull in, you piece-of-shit raghead!"

The total was six dollars and forty cents. I quickly paid the cashier with a ten and he handed me the change. His disgust had now turned to a barely-controlled rage.

"Get out! Get out or I call police — get out of my store!"

On the counter was a small cigarette display. With the swoosh of his hand, James knocked it to the ground, the packs spilling at the man's feet.

"James, that's it! I'm leaving your ass here. This guy's going to call the cops. I'm outta here!" I stalked out.

I jumped in the driver's seat and started the van. James hopped in just as I was backing up.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? You're on parole! Goddamn, James. Get a fucking grip, man."

James was unable to hear me. His alcohol haze had taken over. It usually didn't kick in until after work, but the bell had rung early today. He was unpredictable. James was why maximum-security prisons were built.

"James. Behave yourself at this delivery. I swear if you act up, I'll fucking leave you. . . . JAMES!"

My voice brought him back. "All right, I'm cool," he said. "Those fuckin' sand-niggers. I hate them fuckin' pricks. Buying up all our stores . . . camel-fucking bastards."

As James ranted, I went over the rest of our deliveries in my head. We had four more, and he wouldn't last. I would have to dump him.

"We'll make this drop and then I know a bar down the street. We can stop and have a quick one, how's that sound, man?" I asked him.

"Cool."

A steep hill, a couple turns, and we arrived at the address. The place was massive — a mansion. A long looping driveway led us to the front door. A Jaguar was parked in an alcove.

"Okay, James. Please. Just help me with the boxes. Don't say anything. We'll be out of here in five minutes and at the bar in ten, Okay?"

"Yeah, yeah," he said as he downed his beer in huge gulps, finishing it off.

There were twenty boxes; we grabbed two apiece. We walked through a foyer that led to a door that led to a world we had no right to be in, a world of money spent just to be spent.

I rang the doorbell and it set off a melodic chiming that echoed through. You could hear it bouncing off walls. Off Van Gogh's Irises and Steinway's pianos. Off Persia's rugs and back to us: The bingo card guys.

"Look at this fuckin' place," James said. "I bet some fuckin' ragheads live here, whad'ya wanna bet?"

"Shut up, James. You said you'd be quiet. Shut up."

James was behaving worse than I'd ever seen him. He was always a vile man, but he seemed agitated to a state that scared even me. I prayed for no one to answer. My next request was for the occupant to be a white person. A generic, pleasant white person holding a cold beer and waving a little American flag. For the safety of us all, I prayed.

Barking dogs could be heard approaching from within. Little yapping, fuzzy, hump-your-leg, dogs. Their owner was most likely in tow.

The door opened.

"Get back, Mimi, Fifi. Back."

A woman. A young, pretty, Arab woman!

Shit!

She poked her head through the door enough to keep her dogs in and us out.

"Hello, ma'am. We're here with your bingo cards."

"Yes. Hold please." Her accent was thick and heavy.

She closed the door. I heard the scratching of tiny dog paws on marble floors. She was apparently putting the dogs away.

"You know, James, I can handle this. Why don't you go kick it in the van? I'll be done in a couple."

"No. I don't want to."

"You're cool, right?"

"I'm cool."

She returned. As she opened the door we were smacked with the cool air that wealth buys. We entered into a vast, cold room that had no smell, nothing. Lived-in homes have odors and stench of all kinds. The place smelled empty and unhappy.

"Here, you set them," she said, pointing to a spot next to a sculpture that looked like a fish humping someone's face. At least it did to me.

We set the boxes down where she asked. So far, so good. Not a sound from James.

"We'll get the rest, ma'am," I said.

We were almost to the door when the woman started swearing. It was in a language I didn't understand, but cursing comes through no matter where you're from. She was pointing to the rug by the door. We had tracked in some kind of red-dirt-slime from outside. It looked bad, even to me.

"I'm sorry, Ma'am. I'll clean it. If you give me something to soak it up, I'll clean it. I'm sorry."

"You cannot clean that! It is worth more than you! You ruin it!"

"Then why the FUCK is it by the door, then?"

James.

"I call your boss! Leave the boxes outside. Go! I call your boss!"

James strutted up to her. I tried to run interference, but he wasn't there anymore. His eyes had gone blank, unfocused.

"You fuckin' hoity-toity rich bitch. I oughtta take my dick out and piss on that ugly piece of ass-wipe!"

"JAMES!"

I tried grabbing his arm. He was solid and un-budging — in her face and steaming with rage.

"I call your boss, go. . . ."

She turned to retrieve her phone when James grabbed her. He spun her around, cocked his arm back, and let slam a terrifying blow to her neck! She flew back as if catapulted, landing with a dead, thumping grunt.

"JAMES! What the fuck are you doing! You're insane, man! My God, do you know what you've done?"

James couldn't hear me anymore. He was in a place that I'd never been, a place that gave birth to things like wars, pestilence, famines — and James.

I tried grabbing his arm as he swaggered towards the woman. He was unstoppable. She was conscious, bleeding from her mouth and nose, and her neck was surely broken. It had a grotesque inverted bend to it. She lay there, only able to look up and gasp for air. Her eyes were scared and dying.

"James. You have fucked up beyond any reality. You fucking savage! I can't believe this. People don't do this kind of shit! What has gotten into your head?"

A tiny peep of a voice came from down the hallway. A child.

James jerked his head in the direction of the noise. Possessed, he stepped over the woman and began stalking towards it, homing in on its innocent cry. He was murder, pure and clear. I had never seen such viciousness in a man, such blind evil. James was hell itself. Hell walking.

I fell into a full saturating panic. The dying woman. Prison time. My safety. James on his way to perform crimes against the world. I was not equipped for it.

He had to be stopped. But how? I couldn't overtake him with eight me's. I followed him, watching as he found the source of the noise, and pushed open the door. Soft baby words squeaked from inside. James disappeared into the room.

I had to act. I looked for something to hit him with. Everything was fucking attached! I tried grabbing a lamp but it was bolted down. Why would anyone bolt lamps down? I went to pick up a small statue that stood in the hall. Bolted! There was nothing!

I was scared. I feared for myself, the child, and all the frightening scenarios James was capable of. I opened a door next to the baby's room. It was the room of another child — a bigger one. One who kept his Louisville Slugger in the corner!

I grabbed the bat, and headed for James. As I entered the room, he was holding the child up by the back of its nighty, the way a dog carried its puppy. The little one squirmed and wiggled as James held it high above the crib. There were no cries from it, just unconditional, happy fidgeting.

With his other hand, James unbuckled his pants. They fell to his ankles. He stood there in his soiled underwear. I raised my piece of oak.

"James."

He was gone from this world.

"James!"

Nothing.

"James. The COPS!"

He turned.

I swung down with every bit of decency I had. The hard bat smashed into his skull, his forehead. I watched as his eyes split. His head cracked open and he exploded — blood and other fluids, spewing and spurting out. He dropped hard and ugly. The baby fell back into its crib. It began to cry. I dropped the bat.

"You piece of fucking dogshit!" I yelled down at him. "I never done anything like this! You fuck! You're bad, James! Thoroughly bad through and through!"

I stood for a few seconds, catching my breath, the significance of the event becoming far too real.

I left James and the crying infant in the room and walked out to the entryway where the woman still lay. I went to her and bent down. Her eyes cried for mercy. It hurt.

"Ma'am. I'm so sorry. I'm going to get help for you right now."

There was a phone on the other side of the room. I started towards it. As I did, I heard her grunting out some sort of sad, urgent noise. She wanted something.

"Oh! Oh, ma'am. Your baby! Oh that's right. God, God yes — It's okay, I promise. Nothing happened to it. Nothing's going to. Your baby's fine. I stopped it all."

I went to the phone and dialed 911.

"911 emergency," the woman answered.

"You better come. A guy went crazy. He hurt this woman real bad. You better hurry, I think she might be dying."

"Police and ambulance are on their way, sir. Who are you?"

"Sam. My name is Sam Mackie."

"Where is the man now? Is he in the house?"

"Yes. But I had to stop him. He's worse off than the lady. I think he's dead."

"I need you to stay on the phone with me, sir. Can you do that?"

"Yes, I will; Operator?"

"Yes, sir?"

I wanted to tell her I was sorry.

I didn't.

"Please hurry."

I didn't want to be there anymore.

Karma

(or the day I got some really bad news)

I went to the Doctor's today.
He showed me a picture of health,
and I wasn't in it.

He said I never would be.

I feel like
I'm being chased again
by that dusty old bitch
who seems to follow you
from barstool to jukebox
wantin' to be noticed
or fucked
or somethin'.

You buy the old punchin' bag a drink
hoping she'll drop face on the bar
so you can slip off
to the next joint
but all it does is
raise her skirt a few more inches.

Then you notice she starts swiping
her mouth with a big fat tube
of some red, lipstick-lookin' shit
like she's applyin' motor oil
to a cylinder that's just
dyin' for a piston.

So you start poundin' the bourbons
thinkin' you'll get rude enough
or sad enough
to chase her off
or take her in the shitter
and be done with it.

Instead, Miss Death-on-a-barstool
starts hackin' and yackin'
and tellin' you about her fucked-up
grand kids
and how they're
smokin' crack
and dick
and whatever else
the ungrateful
little fucks
can wrap their

All the while she's spittin'
that red greasy shit
she smeared on her face,
in your face,
makin' her look
like a drunken clown
gone rabid
and you get scared.

She reaches around
and starts tryin'
to grab your noodle
with that pair of chopsticks
she calls fingers
then garbles some words up at you
from a throat full of snot:
"Hey big fella,
I can suck the calories out of a hot dog,
how 'bout it?"

You reel back 'cause you
thought you heard it all
but now you really heard it all
and you figure somebody's
got to be fuckin' with you
'cause this hag can't be real
and you can't be thinkin'
the sick shit
you start thinkin'

So you say "fuck it"
and you tell
the winner of the
Miss Lung Cancer Pageant
to meet you in the crapper
for a dickin'
you hope you'll soon
forget.

You stand at the pisser
tryin' to stroke
Old Yeller
back to life
but the fucker
don't want no part of it.
"Let sleepin' dogs lay sleepin'"
he says.

Right then you catch somethin'
out of the corner of your eye.
Some creepy fag
lurkin' in the dark
wavin'
and winkin'
and flickin'
his tongue at you
through a hole
in the shitter wall

You say what the hell
figurin' you can use
all the helpin' hands
you can get
no matter they're attached
to some cum-lappin'
tweak
with his face
plastered against
the piss-soaked
partition
of a barroom
shithouse.

So you whip out Old Yeller again
and tell him he's got one more
bush to piss on,
then you can let him be.

Zipper down and dick in
you start feelin' like that
long, lone strand
of spaghetti
that just won't pull loose,
'cause your reason for living
ain't comin' to life
and suck-boy
on the other side
ain't takin' no
for an answer.

Just then
Mrs. Reaper
comes bargin' in
but she's to drunk
to notice you
got your pole
in a hole
and she figures
you're just waitin' around
for love

She walks up and latches that
toilet plunger
she calls a mouth
onto your face
suckin' up half your chin
and drainin' that nasty
congestion problem
you had goin' on.

continued on next page.....

'Shit like that
drives men to drink'
you think,
as you shuffle
across the street
to the Blue Tooth,
steal a seat
back by the cigarette machine
and wait for
Art the bartender
to belly-up.

They do.

More of Steven Hoadley may be found in the current issue of MiPoesias Magazine located at www.mipoesias.com

